Prayer for Peace

Psalm 120:1-7
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Commentary

by

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Text:

Psalm 120:1-7
1. I call on the Lord in my distress, and he answers me.
2. Save me, O Lord, from lying lips and from deceitful tongues.
3. What will he do to you, and what more besides, O deceitful tongue?
4. He will punish you with a warrior's sharp arrows, with burning coals of the broom tree.
5. Woe to me that I dwell in Meshech, that I live among the tents of Kedar!
6. Too long have I lived among those who hate peace.
7. I am a man of peace; but when I speak, they are for war. NIV

Introduction:

I. Psalms 120-134 forms a group of fifteen psalms that bear the title, "A Song of Ascents".

   A. The title has been variously interpreted.

      1. The view taken in commentaries is that these are psalms sung by the pilgrims as they made their way up to Jerusalem and the temple for the annual festivals.
2. Some of the psalms in this group may have been originally written for this purpose, but it is not likely that all were.

II. Psalm 120 seems to be from the exilic period, since the psalmist is dwelling among the heathen (Psalm 120:5).

   A. Psalm 120:5, Woe to me that I dwell in Meshech, that I live among the tents of Kedar! NIV

      1. Yet, this could be metaphorical language, indicating Israelites who act like pagans.

Commentary:

A Prayer for Deliverance

Psalm 120:1-2, I call on the Lord in my distress, and he answers me. Save me, O Lord, from lying lips and from deceitful tongues. NIV

Psalm 120:1, I call on the Lord in my distress, and he answers me. NIV

I. The verbs could be rendered in the past tense (the KJV, NASB, NEB), in which case the opening stanza (Psalm 120:1-2) is a summary recollection of deliverance from the distress described in the remainder of the psalm.

    A. Then, the psalm is a psalm of thanksgiving written to celebrate his deliverance.

    B. If the present tense is followed (RSV) the Hebrew perfects are to be understood as characteristic perfects of
experience, which would suggest that deliverance from the present distress has not yet come.

1. In this case, the psalm is to be understood as a psalm of lament and petition.

Psalm 120:2, Save me, O Lord, from lying lips and from deceitful tongues. NIV

I. The imperative identifies the verse as containing the content of the prayer offered.

A. The problem faced is that of lying, deceitful persons who cause him harm.

Punishment of the Deceitful

Psalm 120:3-4, What will he do to you, and what more besides, O deceitful tongue? He will punish you with a warrior's sharp arrows, with burning coals of the broom tree. NIV

Psalm 120:3, What will he do to you, and what more besides, O deceitful tongue? NIV

I. The form of the question involves a frequent Hebrew idiom, "God do so to you, and more also" (1 Samuel 3:17; 1 Kings 2:23; Ruth 1:17).

A. 1 Samuel 3:17, "What was it he said to you?" Eli asked. "Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you." NIV
B. 1 Kings 2:23, Then King Solomon swore by the Lord: "May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if Adonijah does not pay with his life for this request!"

C. Ruth 1:17, Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me." NIV

II. The thought is that God will do something worse to these insolent liars than they have done to the psalmist.

Psalm 120:4, He will punish you with a warrior's sharp arrows, with burning coals of the broom tree. NIV

I. This suggests that God will answer these verbal "arrows" of the wicked (Jeremiah 9:8) with still more powerful and destructive arrows of divine judgment (Psalm 64:3-4 and 7-8).

A. Jeremiah 9:8, Their tongue is a deadly arrow; it speaks with deceit. With his mouth each speaks cordially to his neighbor, but in his heart he sets a trap for him. NIV

B. Psalm 64:3-4 and 7-8, who sharpen their tongues like swords and aim their words like deadly arrows. They shoot from ambush at the innocent man; they shoot at him suddenly, without fear. But God will shoot them with arrows; suddenly they will be struck down. He will turn their own tongues against them and bring them to ruin; all who see them will shake their heads in scorn. NIV
II. Since these liars have kindled strife and contention, God's wrath will be kindled against them like the "burning coals of the broom tree" (Psalm 140:10-11).

A. Psalm 140:10-11, Let burning coals fall upon them; may they be thrown into the fire, into miry pits, never to rise. Let slanderers not be established in the land; may disaster hunt down men of violence. NIV

B. The broom tree has a low combustion point and thus blazes up immediately with intense heat.

Trouble to a Peace-lover

Psalm 120:5-7, Woe to me that I dwell in Meshech, that I live among the tents of Kedar! Too long have I lived among those who hate peace. I am a man of peace; but when I speak, they are for war. NIV

Psalm 120:5, Woe to me that I dwell in Meshech, that I live among the tents of Kedar! NIV

I. "Meshech" refers to a people in the extreme northern part of Mesopotamia, or possibly in a region near the Black Sea.

II. "Kedar" refers to Arabian descendants of Ishmael who lived southeast of Israel.

III. It is impossible, therefore, to think of the psalmist living in the midst of both peoples. Several attempts have been made to solve this problem.

A. Some suggest that the "I" refers to Israel and that exiles were living in these places.
1. However, there is no specific evidence to substantiate this conclusion.

B. Others emend the text to "Massa" (Genesis 25:14) instead of "Meshech".

1. **Genesis 25:14, Mishma, Dumah, Massa. NIV**

2. Massa was a descendant of Ishmael and the reference here, as well as to "Kedar", could be to these Arabians.

3. It is possible, however, that Meshech and Kedar are only meant to be metaphors for the heathen.

**Psalm 120:6, Too long have I lived among those who hate peace. NIV**

I. "Too long" he has dwelt among these hate-mongers.

A. He is desirous of a change of environment.

**Psalm 120:7, I am a man of peace; but when I speak, they are for war. NIV**

I. He is "a man of peace", but they speak "for war".

A. Only God can deliver from such foes (Psalm 120:1-2).

1. **Psalm 120:1-2, I call on the Lord in my distress, and he answers me. Save me, O Lord, from lying lips and from deceitful tongues. NIV**
Application:

I. Both good and bad can be seen in this psalm.

A. The bad is seen in the undeserved suffering of the psalmist.

B. The good is seen in that he has been driven to depend upon God for resolution of his problem.

II. God is a God of justice (Job 34:12; 36:3; 37:23; 40:8; Psalm 9:16; 72:1; 103:6; 140:12; Matthew 12:18; Luke 18:3-8; and Romans 3:25-26).

A. Job 34:12, It is unthinkable that God would do wrong, that the Almighty would pervert justice. NIV

B. Job 36:3, I get my knowledge from afar; I will ascribe justice to my Maker. NIV

C. Job 37:23, The Almighty is beyond our reach and exalted in power; in his justice and great righteousness, he does not oppress. NIV

D. Job 40:8, "Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?" NIV

E. Psalm 9:16, The Lord is known by his justice; the wicked are ensnared by the work of their hands. NIV

F. Psalm 72:1, Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness. NIV
G. Psalm 103:6, The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. NIV

H. Psalm 140:12, I know that the Lord secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy. NIV

I. Matthew 12:18, Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles. KJV

J. Luke 18:3-8, And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; KJV

K. Romans 3:25-26, Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. KJV

III. Faith in these scripture passages should lead the sufferer to depend upon God to act in his own good time and way.

A. For some, resolution will come in this life, for others, it will have to wait until the final day of reckoning.

B. When we see wrongs made right here, we should believe that this will happen absolutely in that day (Matthew 25:31-46).

1. Matthew 25:31-46, When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him,
then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? Or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? Or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away
into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. KJV
Questions

Psalm 120:1-7

(Questions based on NIV text.)

1. "I ___________ on the ____________ in my ______________, and he _______________________ me. ______________ me, O ______________, from ______________ _____________ and from ______________ ______________. What will he ________ to you, and what more ______________, O ______________________ ______________________. He will ______________ you with a ______________'s ______________ of the ______________ ______________.

2. "_________ to me that I ______________ in ______________, that I ____________ among the ______________ of __________! ________________ have I ______________ ______________ who ______________ ______________. I am a ______________ of ______________; but when I ________________, they are for ________________.

3. Why are Psalm 120-134 known as Psalm of Ascents? __________

4. What historical circumstances led to the writing of Psalm 120? Is this psalm written in literal or metaphorical language? __________
5. How can Psalm 120 be classified variously as a psalm of thanksgiving, lament, and petition?

6. What problem did the psalmist face?

7. What is the meaning of the expression, "God do so to you, and more also"? Give biblical examples of its use reflecting this meaning.

8. How would God answer the verbal "arrows" of the wicked?
9. What is a *broom* tree? Why is it mentioned in verse 4? ______

10. Define *Meshech* and *Kedar*. Geographically locate these places. ________________________________

11. Reconcile any discrepancies regarding what is said in verse 5. ________________________________

12. What conflict existed between the psalmist and those among whom he lived? How did the psalmist propose to resolve this conflict? ________________________________

13. What good and bad can be seen in this psalm? _____________
14. Show by the Scriptures that God is a God of justice. ______

15. Faith will lead the sufferer to depend upon God to act to relieve injustice in his own good time and way. When will resolution come? ____________________________

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